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ABSTRACT

Sex-related differences between the employment opportunities available in France to males and females with comparable levels of education were examined through an analysis of data from two types of sources: statistics derived from quantitative surveys conducted on broad samples of graduates 2-4 years after the end of their training and in-depth interviews after a survey of a small sample of higher education graduates 8 years after the end of their training. It was concluded that, although the rate of female labor market activity has risen continuously over the past 35 years and women now constitute 45% of the French labor force, women's careers remain more sharply marked by extra-professional events. The labor market conditions encountered by young men and women 2-3 years after the end of their initial training were similar in the case of individuals with higher education diplomas but significantly more differentiated among men and women with secondary school vocational diplomas. Men were more likely to be employed in production sectors, whereas women were most likely to employed in service occupations. Young women managers' career patterns were comparable to those of men provided the women remained single or established an ad hoc family structure. (MN)

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SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION AND AFTER: DO INEQUALITIES BETWEEN THE SEXES DEFY DIPLOMAS?

The rate of female activity has risen continuously over the past thirty-five years, and women now constitute 45 percent of the labour force. But this hardly means that differences between men and women on the labour market have disappeared. In particular, women's careers remain more sharply marked by extra-professional events. Nonetheless, the persistence of inequalities does not exclude the emergence of encouraging trends, and in this respect, the diploma seems to be an instrument of change.

Higher Levels, Reduced Inequalities

Two or three years after the end of initial training, the conditions encountered on the labour market are similar for young men and women with higher-education diplomas but significantly more differentiated for those with secondary-school vocational diplomas. (1) There is a disparity in the possibilities for access to employment among young men and young women. At the end of higher education, the gap in unemployment rates is low but it is significantly greater for lower diploma levels (vocational *baccalauréat* and CAP-BEP). Similarly, the difference in the possibilities for stabilising work activity through a permanent work contract largely depends on the diploma level attained—while these differences are tenuous at the highest levels, they become much more accentuated below the *baccalauréat*. Part-time activity mainly affects young women with a secondary level of study, while a large majority of young men—whatever their level—and young women with higher-education diplomas work full time (see Table 1).

After the most advanced training in higher education (Grandes Ecoles and graduate school), the large majority of men and women graduates have access to "manager" positions. There is a differential (+ 14 %) in favour of men, with women slightly more often classified in "intermediate occupations". But for the other training levels, the phenomenon of women "sliding" towards lower occupational categories assumes a totally different scope (see Table 2). Young men holding BTS/DUT diplomas are massively classified in "intermediate occupations", while their female counterparts are more often found in the "employees" category (the gaps exceed 30 %). Similarly, the large majority of vocational *baccalauréat* holders reaching the "intermediate occupations" category are men.

These differences in occupational position are accompanied by differences in the kind of jobs held: men are more numerous in production-oriented jobs (private-sector engineers and technical managers, technicians, supervisors, and operatives), while women are more present in jobs associated with service functions (administrative or sales manager or intermediate occupation in the private or public sector and employees). Here too, however, disparities between the sexes are lowest for graduates of the Grandes Ecoles and graduate schools (26 %) and increase at the lower levels (50 % for the BTS/DUT and over 60 % for vocational *baccalauréat* holders and CAP/BEP).

1. Studies conducted by Céreq's EVA Observatory (National Observatory on Entries into Active Life). The following abbreviations are used throughout this article: CAP (vocational aptitude certificate), BEP (vocational studies certificate), DUT (university diploma of technology), BTS (higher technician certificate), DEA (advanced studies diploma) and DESS (higher specialised studies diploma).

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Thus, young women from levels below the *baccalauréat* generally face much greater difficulties in making the school-to-work transition than young men. But at these training levels, they are not preparing for the same occupations. Indeed, guidance counselling is orientated by gender, with service or literary training for girls and industrial or vocational training for boys (see Table 1). The work worlds awaiting the two groups offer neither the same possibilities for labour-market entry nor the same professional recognition of know-how acquired through training or school diplomas. Training specialisations and specific conditions of labour-market entry can thus be related. In particular, we observe that individuals are assigned to more structured, favourable jobs after male industrial training programmes than after female tertiary programmes where young women find themselves competing with their more qualified counterparts.

On the other hand, the work worlds awaiting young men and young women are much closer after higher education. Even if the phenomenon of young women's "avoidance" of the most scientific and technical training continues, this is far from the "compartmentalisation" of training streams observed for the lower levels. Thus, following higher education, women and men enter the same segments of the labour market and for the most part attain the same professional goals. Gender disparities continue, but they are minimal. For these young graduates, there are more similarities than differences in the transition profiles of young women and young men. The diploma is thus a levelling factor between the sexes, and the access of young women to the highest levels helps to reduce differences at the beginning of working life.

Career: The Necessary Trade-Offs of Young Women Managers

The relative closeness of the professional situations observed at the beginning of working life among men and women coming out of some of the most respected higher training programmes (Bac + 5, DEA, DESS) gradually disappears. The examination of careers eight years after labour-market entry reveals significant disparities according to gender.(2) Thus, the most promising professional beginnings—recognition of academic qualifications and access to managerial positions—do not completely insulate women's careers from the influence of extra-professional events. Initially, the conditions of labour-market entry for young women and young

The Rise in Women's Employment

Between 1986 and 1996, the number of women job-holders increased by 850,000 while the number of men dropped by 92,000. In fact, the continuous increase in the rate of labour-force participation of females over fifteen years of age went from 45.9 to 48.5 percent over the same period (reaching 80 % for women in the 25-39 age group in 1996). This was accompanied, however, by an increase in their rate of unemployment, which was 15.6 percent in 1996 (11.5 % for men) and a considerable rise in the number of part-time jobs (in 1996, 28.9 % of employed women worked part-time, as opposed to 4.6 % of employed men).

Among the 850,000 additional working women, 700,000 contributed to the growth of occupations that were already quite feminised. Female employment has thus become that much more concentrated: in 1996, six occupational groups, excluding managers, accounted for more than 60 percent of employed women (teachers, intermediate occupations in health and social work, civil servants, private-sector administrative employees, business employees, and those providing services directly to individuals). It should be noted that these categories covered only 12 percent of their male counterparts, who were also much more dispersed over the range of occupations.

New orientations can be distinguished, however: between 1986 and 1996, the proportion of women among the "managers and higher intellectual occupations" went from 27 to 34 percent, echoing the rise in their level of initial training. In 1991, five out of every ten women went on to higher education, as opposed to four out of every ten men. The increasing number of managerial jobs in the service sector during the 1980s gave women with the most degrees, like their male counterparts, access to the most qualified jobs.

2. Cf. the Céreq study by Thomas Couppié, Dominique Epiphane and Christine Fournier, "Débuts de carrières des hommes et des femmes cadres diplômés de l'Université", carried out with financial support from the French Association of Women University Graduates.

Table 1
Specialisations and Transition Indicators by Diploma and Gender (in %)

	Men			Women			Rate of Unemployment (1)		Rate of Permanent Job Contracts (2)		Rate of Part-Time Work (2)	
Diplomas held:	Manufact.	Service	Total	Manufact.	Service	Total	M	F	M	F	M	F
Grad School/ Grandes Ecoles	55	45	100	24	76	100	3.6	5.4	89	81	3	9
BTS-DUT	63	37	100	11	89	100	3.2	4.3	82	81	3	6
Vocat. Bac	64	36	100	7	93	100	14.8	18.9	63	60	6	18
CAP, BEP	89	11	100	14	86	100	13.0	24.0	58	43	7	36

(1) 33 months after diploma

(2) Last job held

Source: Céreq

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Table 2
Occupational Status and Last Job Held by Gender (1)

	Rate of Managers		Rate of Intermediate Occupations		Rate of Employees, Workers		Production-Oriented Jobs (2)		Service-Related Jobs	
Diplomas held:	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Grad School/ Grandes Ecoles	83	69	13	26	1	3	42	16	58	84
BTS-DUT	5	4	82	90	12	46	61	12	39	88
Vocat. Bac	0	0	24	7	76	93	72	7	28	93
CAP, BEP	0	1	5	7	94	92	82	20	18	80

(1) Last job during the 33 months following diploma

(2) Engineers, technicians, supervisors, workers

Source: Céreq

men seem close, which reflects the similar family status (single, without children). But the period of professional development that follows coincides with the most intense events in the "building" of a family. The reorganisations undertaken with the forming of a couple and the birth of a first child also raise the question of the differentiated advancement of men and women in the professional domain. What are the consequences of family events on the professional life of each?

The analysis of men's and women's schedules over time is rich in information on the changing distribution of roles within the couple and the repercussions of this conjugal division in the area of employment. Changes in the respective shares of professional work, domestic work (including childcare) and leisure activities reflect the organisation of each partner and in particular the place reserved for the job. Among singles or couples without children, men and women divide their time similarly. A detailed study of domestic activities reveals certain disparities, but the respective shares of professional work and leisure activities are similar. What upsets this equitable distribution is the arrival of a child. While most men continue to engage in leisure activities, this is no longer the case for the mothers of young children. As for household tasks, men—when they participate—most often carry them out in the form of "assistance" or even "giving a hand." Many women indicate that they have sole responsibility, or almost, for housework. With regard to professional time, recent fathers either make no changes in their previous situation or envisage a change through a promotion coupled with a raise. None of them expresses the desire to reduce his working hours or reorganise his schedule.

If men are practically unanimous in their responses to the question of professional involvement, women with comparable diplomas, fall into two groups according to their professional behaviours:

• some recent mothers carry out their professional activity in areas (or ways) where their family least "disrupts" the job, notably in the sectors (including the public service) or occupations (the professions) that offer more freedom in personal organisation. They sometimes opt for part-time work or a temporary interruption of their professional activity following events that punctuate family life;

• others, like those who remain single, work full time—or maintain long working hours—and continue to demonstrate considerable availability for their career at the cost of a highly structured personal organisation (delegation of tasks traditionally assigned to women via the support of a family network or home help) or because of conditions tied to the partner's less profitable work activity (partner unemployed or less qualified and thus holding a less lucrative job).

Thus, with regard to employment, young women managers follow a career pattern comparable to that of men on the condition that they remain single or set up an ad-hoc family structure. The multiplicity of female models relative to the single male model counters the temptation to reduce women to a single profile in order to compare it with a male profile and appreciate the differences. The contrasts that emerge lead us to adopt another point of view. Young managers do not assume the constraints or margins of autonomy characterising their jobs in the same way. The question of time, which functions as a mirror of each person's choice of organisation, is more or less consistent with the criteria for promotion in the professional field concerned. In other words, the choices made in managing time are not neutral with regard to the companies' systems of promotion. From that point on, women who exploit the margin of organisational autonomy available to them in order to respond better to the imperatives of family life limit their possibilities of career advancement by abandoning the "promotional model". Conversely, those who adopt a structure in phase with that model preserve—eight years after their entry into the work force—the same career possibilities as men, on the condition that their employer has gone beyond stereotyped representations of the female model of activity.

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Thus, not every woman manager reaps what she has sown. Can we conclude that a development of this model would suffice to promote equality of the sexes, or is it necessary to reconsider more broadly the male-female distribution of social roles?

Thomas Couppié
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Sources and Methodology

This article draws on two kinds of sources: statistics derived from quantitative surveys carried out on broad samples of graduates two to four years after the end of their training and in-depth interviews following a survey of a small sample of higher-education graduates eight years after the end of their training.

The statistical sources on labour-market entry of young graduates come from surveys carried out for the National Observatory on Entries into Working Life (ONEVA). This study uses results from three of those surveys:

• among higher-education graduates from the class of 1988 who were queried in March 1991 (17,400 young people queried, including 8,300 DUT/BTS-holders and 9,100 from graduate schools, engineering schools or business schools);

• among vocational *baccalauréat* holders from the class of 1990 who were queried in October 1992 (3,500 young people queried);

• among CAP and BEP holders from the class of 1989 queried in 1993 (6,000 young people queried).

Each survey recorded the work itinerary over the first thirty-three months following the end of studies (the first twenty-eight months for vocational *baccalauréat* holders).

In the context of a study carried out in collaboration with the French Association of Women University Graduates (AFFDU), we sought to improve our knowledge of the career-building processes and their interaction with the processes of establishing a family. Some forty young people (20 women and 20 men) underwent in-depth interviews eight years after they obtained their diplomas. In order to better identify the effects specific to each gender, we attempted to interview young men and women who were as close as possible in their training (B.A. and graduate-level degree holders in law, economics, computer science, biology, and so forth) and in their professional activity at the outset of their working life (individuals who were employed thirty-three months after their entry onto the labour market and holding a managerial position at that time). This method allowed us to observe potential shifts in career paths during the years that followed these promising beginnings.

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